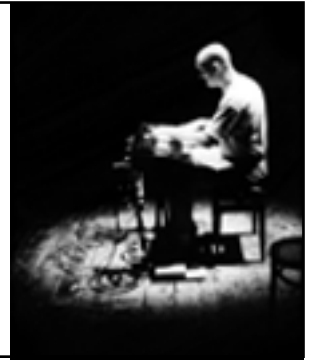


DESERT BOY on a STICK



Joan Jeanrenaud - cello
Jim Magee - poetry + sculpture
Bob Ostertag - composer

Desert Boy on a Stick is a concert-length work for cello, spoken word, and video, with music by Bob Ostertag, and text and images by James Magee. The work is performed by Magee together with internationally-acclaimed cellist Jean Jeanrenaud.

Ostertag based the music on recordings of Magee reciting the titles to his artwork. Working out of his home in El Paso, Magee creates highly unusual sculptures, many of which are then placed in the desert where they can never be moved or sold, or even seen unless Magee himself leads you to them. His work is very much rooted in his desert environment, and Ostertag and Jeanrenaud traveled to El Paso to record him reading in the desert, in his workshop, and across the border at his favorite haunts in Juarez, Mexico. These recordings became the basis for the music.

The work is difficult but also very theatrical, with Jeanrenaud not only playing the cello but pouring rice over it, examining it with medical gloves, and cleaning it and herself. Images of the works of art corresponding to each title are projected. Some fragments of text come from loudspeakers, while others are read live by Magee.

The work was commissioned by Colorado College and the Colorado Springs Fine Art Center, and was premiered there on October 4, 2001.

Composer's Notes

Jim Magee finds his titles in his sculptures. It seemed logical that I should find music in his titles. Logical, though not original. There is a rich but little-known tradition of finding music in the spoken word. Harry Partch, for example, was initially pushed into micro-tonal music by his interest in transcribing speech. He in turn was inspired by the music of ancient Greece, which he claimed was fundamentally based on speech.

So "multimedia" is not something new but dates back to the dawn of Western civilization. Not in the superficial sense of, say, a dancer waving her arm and triggering a sound or light, but in a deeper sense of finding the art in one media and moving it to another. Jim Magee does this in a profound way, made more remarkable by the fact that his is a collaboration with himself, or his selves. I have simply placed myself next in line.

Joan Jeanrenaud follows me closely in this line. Her role goes far beyond that of an interpreter, participating in every meeting, discussion, road trip, or recording that led to the creation of this piece. And in a more narrowly conventional sense, Joan could properly be considered the arranger of this work, as it has been her musical sense more than mine that has made the bare notes come off the page as music.

-- Bob Ostertag, Colorado Springs, October 4, 2001

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Biographies

Joan Jeanrenaud

At age 22 Joan Jeanrenaud joined the Kronos Quartet. For the next 20 years she worked with hundreds of composers and musicians such as John Cage, Astor Piazzolla, Morton Feldman, Philip Glass, Witold Lutoslawski, Michael Tilson Thomas, David Byrne, John Zorn, and many others. She performed more than 2000 concerts throughout the world with the Quartet in locations such as the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Carnegie Hall, Montreux Jazz Festival Kennedy Center, and London's Royal Festival Hall. She made more than 30 recordings with Kronos.

Jeanrenaud left Kronos in 1999 to pursue different artistic directions including solo projects, collaborations with other artists, composition, improvisation, electronics, video and multi-disciplinary performance. In March 1999 she performed Kevin Volans' Cello Concerto with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland marking her first solo appearance with an orchestra in more than 25 years. She has recently appeared at New York's Lincoln Center Out of Doors Festival, The Kitchen, and Guggenheim Museum, at the South Bank Centre in London, and many other venues. Several composers have recently written or are currently writing new works for Jeanrenaud, including Terry Riley, Kevin Volans, Karen Tanaka, and Anthony Davis. Jeanrenaud's most recent recording "Metamorphosis" was released March.

James Magee

James Magee left the former lingerie factory which served as his NY studio in 1977 for Mexico, but the train derailed and he ended up in El Paso, Texas. He has made the Texas border town his home ever since, from where he has created one of the most enigmatic bodies of work in the landscape of American art. Magee's works can weigh up to several tons. On first glance they appear to be collages of industrial debris, yet upon closer inspection one discovers that many of the elements have been manufactured by Magee himself: carefully constructed and rusted junk. His masterworks are installed on a hill in the Texan desert, where they cannot be moved, sold, or even seen unless Magee takes you there.

Magee's works have titles which can run to several pages, and which were the basis for Bob Ostertag's cello suite *Desert Boy on a Stick*.

Magee's alterego is Anabel Livermore, an elderly recluse whose fantastic paintings of the Southwest have been featured in books such as *Flora* by art critic Edward Lucy Smith. First Lady of Texas Laura Bush sponsored a show of Anabel's in her offices at the State Capitol. Magee and Livermore have exhibited widely, including a show they both participated in at the Yale Art Museum.

Bob Ostertag

Bob Ostertag's creative and unorthodox work with digital sampling and recording has established him as an influential pioneer in these media. He has created a string of major multimedia works, combining sound, image, and live performance, and designs his own sophisticated performance software and instruments. His compositions for the Kronos Quartet, his own *Say No More* ensemble, and others, have been recognized as major modern works. His frequent use of political themes compliment his many years of political activism. Twenty CDs of his compositions have been released, and he has appeared at music, film, and multimedia festivals around the globe.

Ostertag dropped out of the Oberlin Conservatory and has eschewed working within the confines of academic music ever since. Instead, he has worked with a radically diverse range of collaborators: avant garders John Zorn and Fred Frith, heavy metal star Mike Patton, cellist Joan Jeanrenaud, jazz great Anthony Braxton, dyke punk rocker Lynn Breedlove, drag diva Justin Bond, film maker Pierre Hébert, and more.

Ostertag settled in New York City in 1978 and immersed himself in the emerging "downtown" music scene. He left music at the end of the 1970s for political work in Central America. In 1988 he relocated to San Francisco and returned to music.